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THESIS

**PEACE
ON THE
KOREAN PENINSULA**

by

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June 2000

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PEACE ON THE KOREAN PENINSULA

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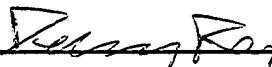
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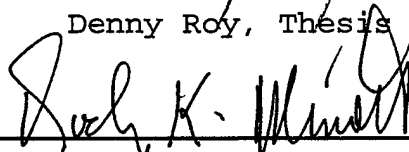


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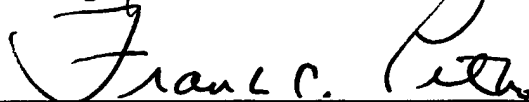
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ABSTRACT

Upon unification, a new Korea will review its various security policies. One of the critical issues to be reviewed will be the future of U.S. forces in Korea. This thesis identifies, evaluates, and summarizes the courses of action (COA) the United States and Korea might pursue after unification. A recommendation of reducing ground forces, maintaining air assets and increasing a naval presence off the peninsula appears to solve both U.S. and Korean post-unification security/stability concerns.

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I. INTRODUCTION

Despite the fact that Korea has been divided for more than 46 years, the peninsula remains one of the most tense and troubled locations in the world. So, as everyone awaits the outcome of this extended stalemate, attention needs to be given to those issues that will be affected by the possible unification of North and South Korea.

The issue that has been and continues to be at the center of controversy between the two Koreas and the United States, is what to do with U.S. forces stationed in Korea after unification? This situation leads to the following questions: what impact will unification have on the future of U.S. forces stationed in Korea? Is sufficient prior planning taking place to address this critical issue? Finally, what are the potential courses of action (COA) available to both governments (South Korea and U.S.) as part of the unification process?

The issue of the future of U.S. forces in Korea after unification, until recently, was only a matter for Korean intellectuals and private citizens to debate. Even the governments involved showed little concern towards addressing the issue, since unification between North and South Korea appeared to be unachievable in the short-term

future. Thus, preparing post-unification plans and strategies presently has been limited.¹ Having made that point, these days the topic of U.S. forces and unification has resurfaced and is more relevant now than at any other time in recent history, given each country's current political, economic, and military condition.

North Korea (DPRK) continues to experience severe food shortages, and analysts predict that the DPRK is on the verge of both economic and political collapse.² This situation increases the chance of Korea unifying now more than at any other time in the past. South Korea, on the other hand, is currently recovering from an economic crisis and taking steps towards rebuilding a stronger economy. The U.S. is presently enjoying an unprecedented level of economic success which is allowing it to remain committed to its security policy in Asia, which is that of maintaining a forward-deployed military presence to help preserve stability in the region.

¹ Chang Seok Yang, (First Secretary, Ministry of Unification), made this comment during an interview while serving at the Korean Embassy in Washington, D.C., May 1999.

² Michael Hass, *Korean Reunification: Alternative Pathways*, (New York, Praeger Publishers, 1989), p. 78.

The previously mentioned conditions are collectively contributing to the unification of Korea and to a resolution being realized over the issue of what to do with U.S. forces after unification. At this point several assumptions are required in order to accomplish a study such as this. Therefore a discussion of the assumptions is in order.

A. ASSUMPTIONS

The critical assumptions that I am making prior to undertaking this thesis are that Korea will reunify sometime in the future and that the government of South Korea will ultimately lead a unified Korea. I also assume upon achieving unification, Korea will then review its various security policies, including future external security agreements and the issue of U.S. forces remaining in a unified Korea. Based on these assumptions, I have analyzed the only possible courses of action (COA) that South Korea might pursue in relation to U.S. forces. However, with approximately 40,000 troops stationed in South Korea, the United States also has COA that need to be addressed and evaluated as they apply to unification.

B. LIMITATIONS

In order to limit the scope of this study, I have not included a detailed formula depicting how unification can or will be achieved. Instead, I have constructed this thesis to assist leaders at all levels in recognizing the possible COA that South Korea and the U.S. may choose to pursue before, during, or after unification.

C. OVERVIEW

Though the goal of both Koreas (for over forty years) has been to successfully unify the peninsula, little consideration has been given towards identifying, evaluating and planning for post-unification concerns. Understanding that unification must occur, it is just as critical to recognize that unless proactive plans are developed to address critical post-unification issues, the unification process will be threatened. Therefore, this topic demands attention.

Once unification occurs, it will be too late to organize plans towards guaranteeing unification and stability throughout the transition period.

If contingency plans are developed beforehand, unification under conditions that add stability to the region will be more likely. Prior planning will also ensure

the future of a unified Korea and a positive U.S.-Korea relationship.

Korean Government officials involved in planning for the unification of North and South Korea admit to concentrating mainly on achieving unification with little time or effort spent towards addressing post-unification issues. Having reviewed the latest Ministry of Unification publications (dated 1998) and after meeting with Ministry of Unification officials, I am convinced that post-unification strategies are under-developed.

Finally, I argue that a step-by-step approach needs to be created to address post-unification issues such as the economy, human rights, and education. With that in mind, I have attempted to address one of the critical post-unification issues: U.S. forces and unification.

D. DESIGN

Beginning with South Korea, four potential COA are identified, evaluated, and summarized. Next, a similar examination is conducted for U.S. COA. Finally, I discuss the conclusion I have reached as a result of my research and offer a recommendation on the future of U.S. forces in Korea after unification.

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II. RECENT KOREAN HISTORY

The conclusion of World War II signaled the end of Japanese colonial rule and occupation of Korea. While liberated, Korea was caught in the middle of a new "Cold War" between the Soviets and the United States. This situation eventually led to Korea being divided, with the Soviets siding with North Korea and the U.S. occupying South Korea.³ Each of these situations was made formal in 1948, when South Korea formed the pro-American Republic of Korea (ROK) and North Korea established the pro-Soviet Democratic People's Republic of Korea (DPRK).⁴

In June 1950, communist North Korean forces invaded South Korea in an attempt to unify the peninsula.⁵ Following the attack the United Nations condemned the action of North Korea and called on member nations to provide South Korea with assistance in the hope of restoring peace and

³ Mark Borthwick, *Pacific Century: The Emergence of Modern Pacific Asia*, (Boulder, Colorado: Westview, 1998), p. 376-382.

⁴ Sung Chul Yang, *The North and Southern Korean Political System: A Comparative Analysis*, (Boulder, Colorado: Westview, 1994), p. 153.

⁵ John J. Metzler, *Divided Dynamism: The Diplomacy of Separated Nations Germany, Korea, China*, (New York, University Press of America, 1996), p. 68.

stability to Korea.⁶ The United States led the sixteen-country coalition force that responded to the request and a bitterly fought conflict ensued ending in a stalemate. In 1953, an armistice agreement was signed and the treaty has remained relatively intact for over 40 years.

In 1962, however, North Korea adopted a "four point" military strategy aimed at unifying the peninsula and destroying the South Korean government. The plan entailed reinforcing its military forces and dispatching "spies and guerrilla forces" to South Korea to carry out various espionage and terrorist activities.⁷

In January 1968, North Korean terrorists managed to reach Seoul and launch a surprise attack on the "Blue House" (the presidential residence). Attacks similar to these have continued over the years and lend credibility to the argument calling for the continued presence of U.S. forces in South Korea.

The South Korean Government, during the same period, was less concerned with undermining North Korea's Government and unification. South Korea, following the end of the Korean War, was consumed with coups, demonstrations, rigged

⁶ John J. Metzler, *Divided Dynamism: The Diplomacy of Separated Nations Germany, Korea, China*, (New York, University Press of America, 1996), p. 69.

⁷ Ibid.

elections, human rights violations, a massacre (Kwangju) and the assassination of a president.⁸ Hence, South Korea concentrated its attention towards resolving issues, such as, establishing military security, maintaining law and order, promoting nationalism and waging war against domestic communism.⁹ The military-based governments from 1961-1988 assigned the highest priority to these issues. South Korean leaders Park and Chun (presidents during the majority of the period) maintained that only after internal issues were addressed and victories achieved, could steps be taken towards greater freedom and unification.

In the 1980's, having somewhat resolved domestic political issues, South Korean bureaucrats shifted the country's focus to that of economic development. Once again, the issue of unification was placed on the "back-burner" of domestic politics. However, publicly, South Korean officials claimed that the ROK was ready to take positive steps towards unifying the peninsula. Even steps to jointly host the 1988 Olympics Games made the news. Yet, privately, many South Korean Government officials argued

⁸ John K. Fairbank, Edwin O. Reischauer and Albert M. Craig, *East Asia, "Tradition and Transformation,"* (Boston, Massachusetts: Houghton Mifflin Company, 1973), p. 917.

⁹ Bruce Cumings, "The Two Koreas: On the Road to Reunification," *Foreign Policy Association*, no. 294, Fall 1990, p. 46-52.

that until the ROK achieved substantial economic development, unification would be disastrous for South Korea.

Anxious for rapid economic growth, South Korea structured its economy on the Japanese model. As a result, South Korea's GNP rose from \$2.7 billion in 1953 to \$120 billion in 1988.¹⁰

Until the 1980's, North Korea had enjoyed an economic edge over South Korea "because most of the Japanese-developed industries and hydroelectric plants were located there."¹¹ However, by 1985, the North's per capita GNP of \$1150 was half that of South Korea's.

During the transitional period, the world also witnessed Kim Jong Il slowly emerge as the "heir apparent" to his father (Kim Il Sung). The younger Kim eventually went on to hold the three top positions within the DPRK Government.¹² Kim Jong Il has also unofficially succeeded his late father as the leader of North Korea. Kim, since taking over has not deviated from his father's ideological

¹⁰ John K. Fairbank, Edwin O. Reischauer and Albert M. Craig, *East Asia, "Tradition and Transformation,"* (Boston, Massachusetts: Houghton Mifflin Company, 1973), p. 921.

¹¹ Ibid.

¹² John K. Fairbank, Edwin O. Reischauer and Albert M. Craig, *East Asia, "Tradition and Transformation,"* (Boston, Massachusetts: Houghton Mifflin Company, 1973), p. 923.

control over the North Korean populace. This situation coupled with few changes in North Korean internal politics signals no real changes in North Korea's policy towards unification with the South.

The continued stalemate surrounding unification has prolonged mistrust between the two countries and augmented the threat of war. In an effort to resolve the problem, both countries have agreed (in principle) to accept a condition of détente and to begin the process of moving towards unification. The problem with this strategy is that both countries "differ on the steps required to develop a détente,"¹³ thus preventing the start of the unification process. This is the situation at the present day.

¹³ Michael Haas, *Korean Reunification: Alternative Pathways*, (New York, Praeger Publishers, 1989), p. 78.

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III. BACKGROUND OF UNIFICATION EFFORTS

In 1946, an attempt to achieve unification for the peninsula surfaced when the United States proposed an agreement at the Joint U.S.-Soviet Commission on Korea. The agreement failed primarily due to conflicting objectives and interests of the superpowers, the United States and the Soviet Union. Following the Joint Commission's failure to reach a solution the United States posed the question of Korea's status to the United Nations.

In 1947, the United Nations General Assembly adopted a U.S.-sponsored resolution to the situation. The resolution called for elections to be held throughout Korea and that a unified Korean government be established under the supervision of the United Nations Temporary Commission on Korea (UNTCOK).

During April 1948, prior to the establishment of the two Korean states a joint conference between political leaders from both North and South Korea met to discuss the possibilities of Korean unification. The conference produced a resolution that in theory promoted a unified Korean government, however, political conflicts between the two governments blocked the effort.

By the latter part of the Korean War, South Korean President Rhee expressed strong opposition to an armistice

agreement that did not address the issue of unification. Rhee maintained that if unification was not a condition of the agreement that South Korea would not support the measure. He also "bluffed" a plan of unification by force. This strategy not only hindered unification efforts, it created unnecessary tension between the U.S. and South Korea.¹⁴

It needs to be made clear that Rhee's administration did propose initiatives towards unifying the two Koreas and securing a lasting peace. One such measure was a "fourteen point proposal" aimed at forming a foundation for unification. The points were specific in nature and based upon legal grounds. As anticipated, North Korea rejected the measure.

In 1955, Kim Il Sung proposed a non-aggression treaty that was rejected by the ROK on the grounds that it appeared to proclaim North Korea and South Korea as two independent and equal nations.¹⁵

In the 1960's, South Korean President Park Chung Hee established a two-phase strategy aimed at achieving unification through peaceful means. The first phase of the

¹⁴ Byung Hwa Lyou, *Peace and Unification in Korea and International Law*, (Baltimore, Maryland, School of Law, University of Maryland, 1986), p. 101.

¹⁵ Michael Haas, *Korean Reunification: Alternative Pathways*, (New York, Praeger Publishers, 1989), p. 3.

strategy was to "concentrate on building national strength through a rapid economic development policy," and not to engage in dialogue with North Korea.¹⁶ The second phase of the strategy began in 1970, when President Park made gradual contact with North Korea. Park's success in reestablishing contact between the two countries led to a herculean effort on the part of both sides towards establishing a framework that would promote unification.¹⁷

In 1971, the DPRK's Supreme People's Assembly formed a proposal that was taken more seriously by the South Korean Government than any previous proposal. That same year the president of the South Korean Red Cross Society proposed conferences be held between the two Red Cross groups in an effort to reunite families that had been separated since the war. In 1973, after several working level meetings were conducted, diplomacy ceased between North and South Korea.¹⁸ During the two years of negotiations, the issue of withdrawing U.S. forces from the peninsula first surfaced. From that point forward, all proposals for unification would

¹⁶ Byung Hwa Lyoo, *Peace and Unification in Korea and International Law*, (Baltimore, Maryland, School of Law, University of Maryland, 1986), p. 102.

¹⁷ Ibid., p. 103.

¹⁸ Tae Hwan Kwak, *In Search of Peace and Unification on the Korean Peninsula*, (Seoul, Korea, Seoul Computer Press, 1986), p. 14-16.

include a clause calling for the withdrawal of U.S. forces from South Korea. This crucial element of the unification formula was reaffirmed in a 1973 speech given by North Korea's leader, Kim Il Sung.

In 1974, North Korea proposed a bilateral peace treaty with the United States, which was never signed. This theme was picked up in 1976 by the Democratic Party presidential candidate, Jimmy Carter, who supported a plan to withdraw U.S. forces from Korea.¹⁹ The idea was later "shelved" due to a negative reaction from Asia experts and veterans of the Korean conflict who argued that a force reduction would destabilize the region. It would not be until 1980 that a call for the removal of U.S. forces from Korea would be made by the DPRK, a call repeated in 1987.

The most recent effort to spur unification took place in 1981, when the International Olympic Committee (IOC) agreed to let Seoul host the 1988 Summer Games.²⁰ As Korea was cast into the spotlight, plans for the peaceful end to the conflict were developed. However, these plans were later cancelled, putting an end to a fantastic opportunity

¹⁹ Dianne L. Smith, *Asian Security to the Year 2000*, (Carlisle Barracks, Pennsylvania, Strategic Studies Institute, 1996), p. 12.

²⁰ Tae Hwan Kwak, *In Search of Peace and Unification on the Korean Peninsula*, (Seoul, Korea, Seoul Computer Press, 1986), p. 60-61.

to unite the peninsula. Since this last attempt to unify, Korea has remained divided into two sovereign countries.

In the early 1990's, South Korea again took action in an attempt to end the prolonged conflict between the two Koreas. To this effort, the ROK Government drafted the "Korean National Community Unification Formula" (KNCUF), which outlined guidelines and policies for unification and inter-Korean relations.²¹ The KNCUF formula has been continually improved upon by each of the administrations during the 1990s.

In 1992, North and South Korea opened a series of high-level talks that resulted in perhaps the two most important documents in the history of intra-Korean relations: (1) The Agreement on Reconciliation, (commonly known as the Basic Agreement); and (2) The Joint Declaration of the Denuclearization of the Peninsula.²² Those two documents form the foundation for peaceful unification. Unfortunately, setbacks linked to the Nuclear Nonproliferation Treaty have dampened South Korea's hope for peaceful unification.

²¹ Ministry of National Unification, *Peace and Cooperation: White Paper on Korean Unification*, (Korea: Ministry of National Unification Republic of Korea, 1996), p. 20.

²² Ibid., p. 21.

Despite South Korea's efforts to implement a strategy for peace and stability, North Korea threatened the peace on the peninsula with its attempt to nullify the Armistice Agreement.²³ Furthermore, in 1996, North Korea resumed its offensive campaign against the ROK, dispatching an ill-fated commando force to the eastern coast of South Korea by submarine. South Korea and the international community condemned the incident and called for the peaceful resolution of tensions. This provocative incident underscores the need for durable peace, which will only come about as the evolutionary process of unification incorporates a "gradual" and "step-by-step" approach to unification.²⁴

The fact that Korean unification has been the publicized goal of both North and South Korea for more than 40 years explains why unification efforts continue to be discussed between the two countries even today despite this long history of failed negotiations.

²³ Ministry of National Unification, *Peace and Cooperation: White Paper on Korean Unification*, (Korea: Ministry of National Unification Republic of Korea, 1996), p. 23.

²⁴ Tae Hwan Kwak, *In Search of Peace and Unification on the Korean Peninsula*, (Seoul, Korea, Seoul Computer Press, 1986), p. 14.

IV. KOREA'S COURSES OF ACTION

The Korean Government has four possible courses of action (COA): Course of Action I - U.S. Forces Remain; Course of Action II - Request Withdrawal of U.S. Forces; Course of Action III - Develop New Security Agreements; and Course of Action IV - Adoption of a Neutral Strategy. Each of these courses of action will now be discussed in greater detail, beginning with Korea's Course of Action I.

A. KOREA'S COURSE OF ACTION I - U.S. FORCES REMAIN IN KOREA

Korea's first course of action is to simply allow U.S. forces to remain in Korea after unification.²⁵ The exact number of personnel and equipment required to remain in Korea potentially will be a topic, part, or condition of unification. Therefore, no practical purpose is served by poring over the numbers until the issue becomes relevant. Yet, it can be argued that it would be an error in judgement if the Korean Government were arbitrarily to decide on a number, if any, of U.S. forces to remain in Korea after unification without at least consulting the U.S. Government. This move would not be perceived as an act of seeking approval of any plan, but rather as an effort to ensure

²⁵ William J. Taylor, Jr. and Michael J. Mazarr, "US-Korean Security Relations: Post-Reunification," *The Korean Journal of Defense Analysis*, vol. 4, no. 1, Summer 1992, p. 164.

future cooperation and the maintaining of an alliance between the two countries following unification. Such a position has received favorable support from the Korean Government and past President, Roh Tae Woo.²⁶

1. Impact I - Political Considerations

Like past administrations, South Korea's current president and government support a policy of continued U.S. military presence after unification, believing it offers continued security. Such security in the future would allow a unified Korea to be tied into the United States' Northeast Asian security system (umbrella) and receive assistance as a military ally of the United States.²⁷ Additionally, given the geographical distance between the United States and Korea, the United States is the perfect partner because it is less likely to interfere in Korea's domestic issues than any other potential Asia-Pacific major power ally following unification.²⁸

²⁶ William J. Taylor, Jr. and Michael J. Mazarr, "US-Korean Security Relations: Post-Reunification," *The Korean Journal of Defense Analysis*, vol. 4, no. 1, Summer 1992, p. 159.

²⁷ Byung Hwa Lyoo, *Peace and Unification in Korea and International Law*, (Baltimore, Maryland, School of Law, University of Maryland, 1986), p. 114.

²⁸ William J. Taylor, Jr. and Michael J. Mazarr, "US-Korean Security Relations: Post-Reunification," *The Korean Journal of Defense Analysis*, vol. 4, no. 1, Summer 1992, p. 159.

A critical consideration in allowing U.S. forces to remain on the peninsula after unification is that South Korea will continue to enjoy the strong bilateral relationship that has existed for nearly five decades. The beneficial relationship has yielded a deterrence to war and made it possible for citizens of South Korea to enjoy a defacto peace and a relatively stable democracy.²⁹

A continued U.S. presence would help a unified Korea guarantee its territorial and political integrity and maintain the existing level of security agreements between the U.S. and Japan. Thus, allowing U.S. forces to remain reduces the likelihood that in the future the U.S. would become an active threat to Korea.³⁰

Finally, Korean Government officials that are pro-U.S. understand that the majority of Koreans have a desire for U.S. forces remaining in Korea after unification. Hence, this situation requires a strategy be developed to achieve a balance between fulfilling citizen expectations and meeting Korea's national security needs prior to unification. A

²⁹ This view is expressed in "Stepping Stone Towards a Peace Mechanism," *Korea Update*, vol. 8, no. 17, p. 2.

³⁰ Byung Hwa Lyou, *Peace and Unification in Korea and International Law*, (Baltimore, Maryland, School of Law, University of Maryland, 1986), p. 112.

plan allowing U.S. forces to remain in Korea accomplishes both.³¹

2. Impact II - Military Considerations

A continued U.S. military presence in Korea after unification would also assist in maintaining regional stability in that part of the world. Specifically, a U.S. presence would deter any other regional power from attempting to dominate the region or attack the Korean Peninsula. Given Korea's history of invasions and occupations at the hands of China and Japan, having the U.S. as a continued ally appears to be beneficial for Korea.

Korea might also use the issue of keeping U.S. forces on the peninsula to gain leverage in the area of military technology transfer. The Korean Government argues it is not receiving adequate levels of technology to keep pace with technical advances.³² In an attempt to correct the technology shortfall, the Korean Government could agree to allow U.S. forces to remain after unification if the U.S. Government agrees to assist in the modernization and improvement of Korea's unified Armed Forces in the future.

³¹ Jack G. Callaway, *Korea: Future Problems, Future Policies*, (Washington, D.C., National Defense University, 1977), p. 2-3.

³² Ibid., p. 162.

3. Impact III - Economic Considerations

Maintaining the existing alliance between Korea and the United States could benefit a unified Korea by using the alliance issue as economic leverage over the U.S., ensuring that America's trade market remains open to Korean exports. Keeping the market open is essential and of critical importance if a unified Korea is to keep government expenditures low during the restructuring period following unification.

Just as important to the economic stability of Korea will be the continued perception by foreign investors that current and future investments and joint venture projects are safe and profitable. Having U.S. personnel in Korea after unification accomplishes this mission.

Having U.S. forces remain also translates into earned income, generated by taxing foreign business ventures that feel confident in the stability of Korea. The funds generated from this situation would assist in offsetting the costs associated with the unification process (estimated to be as high as \$1.7 billion).³³

A U.S. presence could also assist in maintaining a stable exchange rate, which will keep both import and export

³³ Marcus Noland, Sherman Robinson, and Li-Gang Liu, *The Costs and Benefits of Korean Unification*, (Washington, D.C., Institute for International Economics, 1998), p. 10-14.

prices competitive at home and overseas, thus maintaining a balance of trade. Stability will also be a criterion if the Korean Government decides to solicit low interest loans from the World Bank to assist with the restructuring of Korea's economy. A guarantee of continued democracy, peace, and a U.S. presence would lend creditability to Korea's ability to repay the loans.³⁴ A key budgeting benefit associated with retaining U.S. forces after unification will be that a portion of Korea's military can be demobilized, thus reducing government expenditures. Once a portion of the military demobilizes, resources that are released from a relatively low income producing activity can be transferred into more productive activities in the civilian sector. Thus, Korea's national income would increase along with its tax base.³⁵

B. KOREA'S COURSE OF ACTION II - REQUEST WITHDRAWAL OF U.S. FORCES

The Korean Government, motivated by a combination of factors, could simply request that the U.S. Government withdraw all or a portion of its forces from a unified Korea sometime during the unification process. Potentially, the

³⁴ Marcus Noland, Sherman Robinson, and Li-Gang Liu, *The Costs and Benefits of Korean Unification*, (Washington, D.C., Institute for International Economics, 1998), p. 9-14.

³⁵ Ibid.

Korean Government could ask U.S. forces to depart Korea even before the unification process begins. This course of action would set the stage for an "autonomous" Korea to function on its own.³⁶ Anti- U.S. forces sentiment, economic disputes, or military disagreements potentially could spark this course of action.

As long as U.S. forces have been on the Korean Peninsula, animosity has existed towards those forces. For a variety of reasons, U.S. forces have had an impact on Korea's political, economic, and societal sectors. Given the differences between the two cultures, perhaps the most significant effects have taken place in Korean society. A younger, comparatively broadminded Korean might argue that no other country, Japan included, has had such a profound affect on Korea as the United States.³⁷ A similar view is cited by Suk Bok Lee, in his book, *The Impact of US Forces in Korea*:

³⁶ William J. Taylor, Jr. and Michael J. Mazarr, "US-Korean Security Relations: Post-Reunification," *The Korean Journal of Defense Analysis*, vol. 4, no. 1, Summer 1992, p. 158.

³⁷ Suk Bok Lee, *The Impact of US Forces in Korea*, (Washington, D.C., National Defense University Press, 1987), p. 98.

The U.S. forces in Korea had the greatest impact on Korean society, greater than any other foreign presence in her history. Even the Japanese had less influence on Korea in their 35 years of colonial rule than the U.S. Forces, who were never autocratic, did. The USFK brought a new wind, "American style." The new wind created a whirlwind of democracy in the political and social systems. The modernizing trends clashed with intolerant customs and primitive industries. South Korea's whole culture and lifestyle were westernized. As a result, some old Korean standards of good morality and customs are dying away, unfortunately. American cowboy movies, broadcasting, Christian churches, pop music, relief material, PX goods, books, magazines, soldiers' attitudes, transcultural marriages-all were suddenly introduced into Korean society.³⁸

Lee argues that clashes between American and Korean cultures will continue into the future and may possibly escalate in scope and impact. Moreover, when Korea unifies and the threat of war has diminished, the tendency to overlook American indiscretions may become a custom of the past. It may be argued that Koreans will become less tolerant of American oversights and will seek to hold Americans more accountable for their actions than has been the custom in the past. Issues that were conveniently covered by SOFA agreements between the two countries may be revised or suspended entirely to accommodate a new philosophy of a unified Korea. Cultural differences appear

³⁸ Suk Bok Lee, *The Impact of US Forces in Korea*, (Washington, D.C., National Defense University Press, 1987), p. 98.

to be a potential subject that could increase friction between the two nations. Regardless of whether unification takes place, future security agreements between the two countries based on these differences, conceivably could have far-reaching ramifications. For instance, if the U.S. withdraws its forces on its own, either before or after unification, this act could inspire an anti-American climate similar to the feelings felt by many Koreans over Japan's occupation of Korea.³⁹

1. Impact I - Economic Considerations

Similar to the issue of anti-Americanism, economic conditions could also have an impact on the status of U.S. forces in Korea. Trade conditions have, on occasion, caused friction between Korea and the U.S. Government. Several past U.S. trade policy changes towards South Korea have changed the attitudes of both countries towards each other and the relationship they share.⁴⁰ Yet, given history and the importance of trade to Korea's economy, it is reasonable to believe that the situation will not drastically change after unification. Nevertheless, the situation could be

³⁹ Doug Badow and Ted G. Carpenter, *The U.S.-South Korean Alliance: Time for a Change*, (New Jersey, Transaction Publishers, 1992), p. 91, 124-125.

⁴⁰ Robert A. Scalapino, 69: *The Washington Papers, The United States and Korea: Looking Ahead*, (Beverly Hills, California, Sage Publications, 1979), p. 42.

made worse if, upon unification, the U.S. pressures South Korea to purchase U.S. goods and services during the process of rebuilding North Korea or if South Korea feels that it is being forced by the U.S. to accept North Korea before its economically ready. An example of an item that would give rise to Korean emotions is the issue of U.S. rice exports to Korea. If the U.S. pressures South Korea to accept rice imports anytime during the unification, this could possibly be the "straw that breaks the camel's back."

Koreans by way of their culture and history have a long attachment to rice and rice farming. Therefore, Koreans bitterly resent any attempts by other countries to penetrate Korea's rice market. Experts argue that there has never been a question of whether there will be a domestic shortfall in production and a legitimate requirement for imported rice, but rather an action such as this would be perceived as an attack on basic Korean culture. This situation could potentially be changed given North Korea's food shortages and the increased population that the South Korean Government may be responsible to feed at the beginning of unification. Yet, Korea's position most likely will not change, thus increasing the pressure to import U.S. products (especially rice), which could be met by increased public pressure demanding the withdrawal of U.S. forces.

2. Impact II - Military Considerations

A catalyst that could push a unified Korean Government to request that U.S. forces be withdrawn from Korea is military disagreements, particularly over burden sharing and the transfer of military technology.⁴¹

The United States and a unified Korean Government will most assuredly renegotiate the level of support that Korea contributes towards its share of the defense burden. However, each side's perception may differ greatly as to what constitutes the other's fair share. This issue could have significant political and policy repercussions for a new unified Korean Government. The argument is supported by past statements that even if unification were not to take place, Seoul would not be receptive to the idea of being asked to contribute more than its perceived fair share to the defense of Korea, given its current economic problems.⁴²

The second situation that could result in a military disagreement is the transfer of military technology. The Korean Government has at times perceived that the U.S. Government has applied pressure on Korea to purchase

⁴¹ Doug Bandow and Ted G. Carpenter, *The U.S.-South Korean Alliance: Time for a Change*, (New Jersey, Transaction Publishers, 1992), p. 83-85.

⁴² Ibid., p. 82-83.

American weapons systems without advanced technology.⁴³ If this type of perceived pressure were to continue up to and through unification, such a situation would only add to the tension and problems that already exist between the two governments.

A slightly different scenario that could trigger a disagreement between the two governments is the proliferation of North Korea's nuclear technology as part of the unification process. South Korea may demand that U.S. forces be withdrawn from the peninsula if as a result of South Korea taking control of North Korea's nuclear facilities the United States attempts to dictate nuclear policies/programs for a united Korea. Any perception on the part of a united Korea that the U.S. is impeding South Korea's ability to collect such information might lead to a call for the withdrawal of U.S. troops with the possibility of inviting the U.S. back only after all valuable information is collected.

The South Korean Government's anticipation or paranoia involving U.S. efforts to prevent Korea from gaining advanced technology as a result of unification could produce a benchmark calling for the withdrawal of U.S. forces.

⁴³ William J. Taylor, Jr. and Michael J. Mazarr, "US-Korean Security Relations: Post-Reunification," *The Korean Journal of Defense Analysis*, vol. 4, no. 1, Summer 1992, p. 162-163.

Additionally, if Koreans feel the U.S. is attempting to keep a unified Korea dependent on the U.S. for military technology as well as other types of assistance, the South Korean Government may encounter a great deal of public pressure. Such pressure could lead to the Korean Government having no choice but to demand that U.S. forces be withdrawn from a unified Korea.

If two or all three of these scenarios take place the possible changes to current security policies could come in the form of: an end to a Korea-U.S. security pact that both countries have enjoyed for over forty years, or Korea demanding that the U.S. withdraw its forces from the peninsula.

3. Impact III - Political Considerations

A possible underlying issue of course of action II will be Korean national pride.⁴⁴ The unpredictable effect that nationalism could have on a unified Korea and its security partners is difficult, at best, to quantify at this point. Nevertheless, given Korea's history and the sense of pride that Koreans will have for a unified Korea, it can be said

⁴⁴ Doug Bandow and Ted G. Carpenter, *The U.S.-South Korean Alliance: Time for a Change*, (New Jersey, Transaction Publishers, 1992), p. 124-125.

that these feelings may very well affect the country's future agreements and solutions to problems that arise from unification. Such issues may produce results that both countries are unwilling or unable to accept.

One circumstance that would be unacceptable to a unified Korean Government is that of Korea being placed into the role of a client state of the United States. Anything less than a full partnership in an alliance would be construed as a condescending act by an ungrateful friend and ally of the past. South Korea's economic accomplishments lend support to Korea's likely demand that it be treated no less favorably than Japan. If Koreans perceived they were less than equal partners, the alliance might not survive.

The ending of the alliance would force Korea to decide if it wanted to "go it alone," developing its own "Juche" defense policy, or possibly join ranks with another country. Given Korea's history of being dominated and occupied by foreign powers, a unified Korea is more likely to choose self-reliance. Such a position would be much more tenable if South Korea obtained North Korea's nuclear capabilities as part of the unification process. Possessing a nuclear weapons arsenal would instantly catapult a unified Korea to

the level of a major power.⁴⁵ This situation would place a unified Korean Government in the position of not answering questions regarding policies or actions to any foreign nation. Such a situation would be very well received by hard-line Korean nationalists, especially former North Koreans.

C. KOREA'S COURSE OF ACTION III - DEVELOP NEW SECURITY AGREEMENTS

A third possible course of action available to a unified Korean Government is to end its alliance with the U.S. and enter into a new security and support agreement with a strong regional power, e.g., Russia, Japan or China.⁴⁶

1. Russia

A unified Korean partnership with Russia in the future appears to be unlikely, given Russia's current economic state. Korean officials understand that Russia, the only member of the new Commonwealth of Independent States that shares a border with Korea, is currently preoccupied with

⁴⁵ William J. Taylor, Jr. and Michael J. Mazarr, "US-Korean Security Relations: Post-Reunification," *The Korean Journal of Defense Analysis*, vol. 4, no. 1, Summer 1992, p. 151.

⁴⁶ Tae Hwan Kwak, *In Search of Peace and Unification on the Korean Peninsula*, (Seoul, Korea, Seoul Computer Press, 1986), p. 70.

its own economic recovery and political stability.⁴⁷ The level of support that would be required by a newly unified Korea makes Russia an unsuitable partner, now and in the short-term future, in the absence of a common third party threat. Nevertheless, pressure from the U.S. and Japan or a nuclear threat posed by China could change a unified Korea's view. These two conditions would most likely force a unified Korea to join forces with Russia. Even if a unified Korea possessed nuclear capabilities (formerly North Korea's), it would welcome the support of a former superpower in defending itself.⁴⁸

In anticipation of such a scenario, the South Korean Government has started to assist private Korean companies with "cautiously investing" in Russia (especially the eastern region). The forging of such ties is the foundation for possible future security agreements between the two countries.

2. Japan

Japan, a regional "economic superpower" that possesses the ability to support a unified Korea, is also an unlikely

⁴⁷ William J. Taylor, Jr. and Michael J. Mazarr, "US-Korean Security Relations: Post-Reunification," *The Korean Journal of Defense Analysis*, vol. 4, no. 1, Summer 1992, p. 156.

⁴⁸ Doug Bandow and Ted G. Carpenter, *The U.S.-South Korean Alliance: Time for a Change*, (New Jersey, Transaction Publishers, 1992), p. 107-111.

partner to any security agreement at the present time because of the shared history of the two countries. Koreans have not forgotten, nor forgiven, the brutal suffering inflicted on them by the Japanese during the occupation of Korea in 1895-1945. Even today, the Korean Government continues to seek formal apologies and monetary reparations from the Japanese Government over issues, such as the comfort women and "colonial excesses." For these reasons, one could understand why a unified Korea might not be receptive to a Korea-Japan alliance. However, one of the following scenarios could lead to a Korea-Japan security agreement. First, U.S. forces either leave Korea or are requested to withdraw. Second, Japan actively begins to commit resources towards rearming itself, with a vision of once again becoming the regional superpower. Third, as a result of Japan rearming itself, a unified Korea foresees itself on a collision course with Japan.⁴⁹ Hence, a united Korea decides to "bandwagon" with Japan. Yet, if this particular situation were to come to light, a unified Korea would probably feel more secure and comfortable embracing a security agreement with China rather than with Japan.

⁴⁹ William J. Taylor, Jr. and Michael J. Mazarr, "US-Korean Security Relations: Post-Reunification," *The Korean Journal of Defense Analysis*, vol. 4, no. 1, Summer 1992, p. 169.

3. China (PRC)

Of all the possible partners that a unified Korea might choose to join forces with, China appears to be the leading candidate, based on the following evidence. China possesses the closest cultural match to a unified Korea. China would gain the support of both North and South Korean nationalists, who would prefer an alliance with an Asian country to a non-Asian country, e.g., the United States.⁵⁰ The best reason for a unified Korea to align itself with its northern neighbor is the fact that China possesses the nuclear capabilities to protect Korea from other regional powers, especially Japan.⁵¹

A Sino-Korean alliance could also come to fruition if Japan and Russia were ever to resolve their differences and develop a bilateral security agreement. Russia might barter with its supply of raw materials, whereas Japan could supply Russia with much needed capital and technology. The foreseeable advantages of such an alliance add to its credibility and potential to take place. Most assuredly, if

⁵⁰ William J. Taylor, Jr. and Michael J. Mazarr, "US-Korean Security Relations: Post-Reunification," *The Korean Journal of Defense Analysis*, vol. 4, no. 1, Summer 1992, p. 169.

⁵¹ Franklin B. Weinstein and Fuji Kamiya, *The Security of Korea: U.S. and Japanese Perspectives on the 1980s*, (Boulder, Colorado, Westview Press, 1980), p. 128-136.

this scenario were realized, then the likelihood of some level of a Sino-Korean security alliance being formed would increase, even if a unified Korea possessed nuclear weapons capabilities.

D. KOREA'S COURSE OF ACTION IV - ADOPT A NEUTRAL STRATEGY

Possibly the last course of action that a unified Korea might adopt is a position of neutrality. "Korea could seek to become the Sweden or Switzerland of Asia: nonaligned, neutral in major disputes."⁵² An argument in favor of this scenario could be made on the grounds that Korea, following unification, will be so preoccupied with internal matters that it will not be able to be a viable security partner for any country. Additionally, Korea will not require the same level of security alliances because the North Korean threat will have been extinguished. A nonaligned, neutral position might also be sought following unification if Korea perceives itself as being a formidable force and possessing treacherous terrain. United, Korea is more resistant to attack.⁵³ Neutrality would also provide a means of allowing a unified Korea to play the various regional and non-regional powers against one another, in an effort to avoid

⁵² William J. Taylor, Jr. and Michael J. Mazarr, "US-Korean Security Relations: Post-Reunification," *The Korean Journal of Defense Analysis*, vol. 4, no. 1, Summer 1992, p. 158.

⁵³ Ibid.

major confrontations. This course of action seems to solve the major problems that a newly unified Korea might face, e.g., the client state issue with the U.S., having to forge a potential partnership with an old enemy (Japan), or having to play the role of little brother to a regional superpower (China). This course of action would seem very attractive to a unified Korea. Yet, a position of neutrality ignores Korea's long history of occupations and the peninsula's strategic location. Moreover, if Korea selects a position of neutrality it (Korea) would be solely responsible for the total cost of defending the Korean Peninsula.

A unified Korea also could become subject to military pressure from other Asian-Pacific great powers if it (Korea) chooses not to be aligned with the support of a major power. Thus, Korea developing a neutral position as the country's foreign policy fails to guarantee the long-term security of the peninsula in the future and closely resembles the policies that failed during the 19th and early 20th centuries.

E. SUMMARY OF KOREA'S COURSES OF ACTION

A unified Korea has four COA regarding the future of U.S. forces either before, during, or after unification. Korea's most viable course of action is to maintain its current security agreements with the U.S. and allow U.S. forces to remain in a unified Korea with such details as

redefining the United States' mission, scope, and number of troops to be worked out later. It should be expected that this course of action, like the others offered in this paper, will meet with some level of resistance and controversy from those who feel their interests may have been infringed upon. Nevertheless, if a unified Korea does not continue with the U.S. as a security partner, it (Korea), most assuredly will be forced to align with another regional power. China is most likely to be that power given the cultural and historical background the two nations share. As for taking a position of neutrality or a unified Korea "Juche" defense policy, both courses of action rely heavily on Korea's ability to possess nuclear weapons, thus ensuring its own security.⁵⁴

⁵⁴ William J. Taylor, Jr. and Michael J. Mazarr, "US-Korean Security Relations: Post-Reunification," *The Korean Journal of Defense Analysis*, vol. 4, no. 1, Summer 1992, p. 159.

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V. UNITED STATES' COURSES OF ACTION

It is the intent of this thesis to argue that the U.S. will not stand idly by while a unified Korea dictates security agreements or alliance policy changes pertaining to U.S. forces without having input into any decision. The U.S., unlike Korea, will only face two basic courses of action on the issue of what to do with U.S. forces in Korea before, during, and after unification. The first course of action is to withdraw U.S. forces from the peninsula, which would undoubtedly lead to a weakening of the U.S.-Korea alliance.⁵⁵ The second course of action is for the U.S. to allow its forces to remain on the peninsula after unification. If this course of action is chosen, issues such as those mentioned earlier - mission, scope, number of personnel, and responsibility - will need to be addressed. Nevertheless, the result will be the same. U.S. forces will remain in Korea after unification. Each of these COA will now be discussed in greater detail, beginning with U.S. course of action I, withdrawing its forces.

⁵⁵ William J. Taylor, Jr. and Michael J. Mazarr, "US-Korean Security Relations: Post-Reunification," *The Korean Journal of Defense Analysis*, vol. 4, no. 1, Summer 1992, p. 164.

A. UNITED STATES' COURSE OF ACTION I - WITHDRAW FORCES

The U.S. could make a strong case for withdrawing its forces from Korea after unification. The areas that this essay argues which have the greatest potential impact on the decision are the presented previously: military, economic, and political considerations.

1. Impact I - Military Considerations

It is widely held that the reasons for maintaining U.S. forces on the Korean peninsula are to deter North Korea from attacking South Korea and to maintain stability within the region. U.S. forces also add pressure on North Korea to pursue a policy of cooperation and peaceful unification.⁵⁶ However, once the peninsula is unified, the conditions supporting the maintaining of U.S. forces in Korea and the continuation of the U.S. alliance with South Korea may cease to exist. At this historic juncture, many observers may conclude that U.S. forces can, and need to be, withdrawn from Korea. An argument supporting this idea might be that regardless of past history the other regional powers, e.g., China, Japan, and Russia, currently pose no potential threat to a unified Korea. This could end the protective service

⁵⁶ William J. Taylor, Jr. and Michael J. Mazarr, "US-Korean Security Relations: Post-Reunification," *The Korean Journal of Defense Analysis*, vol. 4, no. 1, Summer 1992, p. 163.

that the U.S. has been providing South Korea for over forty years.

Recent developments lend credibility to this scenario. Japan has made and continues to make reparations for its actions during the time it occupied Korea.⁵⁷ More importantly, Japan has not unveiled any military plan that might place it and a unified Korea on a collision course. In fact, a case could be made that Japan is more interested in the potential economic issues that will result once Korea unifies.⁵⁸ Similarly, China and Russia appear to be so preoccupied with their own domestic situations that neither seems to pose much of a threat to a unified Korea. Based on the previous arguments, a continued need for U.S. forces to repel an external threat would seem difficult to support.

2. Impact II - Economic Considerations

One of the obstacles that will need to be overcome is the expense related to maintaining U.S. forces in a unified Korea. Even though U.S. Armed Forces personnel levels are at an all-time low and commitments of forces are at an all time high, there are members of Congress that still favor a continued "draw-down" of military forces. The total number

⁵⁷ Ministry of National Unification, *Peace and Cooperation: White Paper on Korean Unification*, (Korea, Ministry of National Unification Republic of Korea, 1996), p. 31.

⁵⁸ Ibid.

of forces stationed in Korea is approximately 40,000. If Korea were to unify, a case could be made that personnel and units in Korea should be cut based on the reduced threat level. Although the South Korean Government contributes its fair share to the maintaining of U.S. forces in Korea, the U.S. Government could, for economic reasons, still pursue the option of withdrawing its forces from Korea after unification.⁵⁹ However, if Korea unifies and continued U.S. presence is requested, officials in the U.S. government may call for increased financial support of U.S. forces by a unified Korea. The potential reaction to this scenario is difficult to determine and may hinge on how unification is achieved, through conflict or peace.

An alternative argument that could be made by U.S. government officials is that due to economic conditions in the United States, Washington has decided that the need for two forward bases in Asia (Japan and Korea) is unjustifiable, and the idea of deactivating one theater does have merit. In this situation, the U.S. would most likely choose Japan over Korea. This argument is based on two elements: (1) Japan is key to the United States' security plan in Asia; (2) Japan would probably be able to contribute

⁵⁹ Doug Bandow and Ted G. Carpenter, *The U.S.-South Korean Alliance: Time for a Change*, (New Jersey, Transaction Publishers, 1992), p. 91.

more financially than Korea towards the maintaining of U.S. forces in the future.⁶⁰

3. Impact III - Political Considerations

There are several potential political considerations justifying the withdrawal of U.S. forces from Korea after unification. The possible reasons include military and economic factors, future alliances/security agreements, and an anti-Korean movement.

As previously discussed, military and economic issues can easily be drawn into the political forum in order to justify the withdrawing of U.S. forces from Korea after unification. Just as easily, justification can be made on the basis of disengaging from old and outdated alliances. In the case of Korea, when North Korea is no longer a threat, critics could argue that a continued security alliance with Korea is not in the best interest of the United States. Additionally, if a unified Korea were to become involved in a dispute or conflict with a regional power and the U.S. was tied to Korea, it would be possible for the U.S. to be drawn into a costly commitment over an issue in which U.S. interests are minimal, if any.

⁶⁰ Doug Bandow and Ted G. Carpenter, *The U.S.-South Korean Alliance: Time for a Change*, (New Jersey, Transaction Publishers, 1992), p. 138.

Another element of political justification to end U.S.-Korean ties could be an anti-Korean Movement. This topic covers a variety of issues ranging from U.S.-Korea trade problems to anti-American rhetoric. Individually, none of these issues are liable to significantly impact U.S.-Korea security agreements. However, taken collectively and/or combining them with military and economic issues, the potential for a drastic change in the relationship between the two countries becomes very real. Ultimately, the key element that could sway American political leaders into calling for the withdrawal of forces from Korea is public opinion. If and when the U.S. public turns against Korea, or no longer cares to support the former ally, the likelihood of U.S. forces being withdrawn from Korea becomes a real possibility.

A second source of potential trouble between the U.S. and Korea would be an anti-American movement. In this age of globalization and instant news, if Koreans (students, factory workers, or farmers) were seen on television burning the U.S. flag and undertaking massive protests calling for an end to U.S. forces in Korea, the American public might grant that wish. A view of "why should U.S. forces be in

Korea if they are not wanted" would be held by the U.S. public.⁶¹

B. UNITED STATES' COURSE OF ACTION II - UNITED STATES FORCES REMAIN

For over forty years, the U.S. has made a convincing argument for keeping U.S. forces on the Korean Peninsula. A similar case could also be made for keeping forces there after unification. For reasons like those in support of withdrawing forces (military, economic, and political), the same considerations could be used to argue for U.S. forces to remain in Korea. This section will examine these topics and their impact on U.S. forces remaining in Korea after unification.

1. Impact I - Economic Considerations

While the economic benefits associated with U.S. forces remaining in Korea after unification are subject to debate, continued trade between the two countries is not. Both Korea and the U.S. have benefited from the importing and exporting of each other's products and services and neither country shows any indication of wanting to disturb the current situation. In fact, U.S. businesses continue to negotiate to gain even greater access into the Korean market

⁶¹ Doug Badow and Ted G. Carpenter, *The U.S.-South Korean Alliance: Time for a Change*, (New Jersey, Transaction Publishers, 1992), p. 83.

place. Allowing U.S. forces to remain in Korea after unification would give U.S. businesses greater leverage during trade meetings with Korean officials.⁶² Another trade issue that could be closely linked to U.S. forces remaining in Korea is the sale of U.S. arms and technology to a unified Korea. Though Korea has begun to buy these items from other countries and even produce some of its own military equipment, Korea still purchases the majority of its military equipment from the United States. Therefore, if the U.S. remains on the peninsula after unification, it will probably remain the largest supplier of military equipment to a unified Korea. Yet, if U.S. forces were to be withdrawn from Korea before, during, or after unification, the leverage and market share that the U.S. has enjoyed and the influence over Korea's decisions to purchase U.S. military equipment could be reduced substantially.

Perhaps the biggest problem with keeping U.S. forces in Korea will be simple economics. The question of who, and how much should be paid after Korea unifies by both countries could be the determining factor whether forces stay or leave. A major condition that both countries need to consider is the cost of maintaining a force (burden

⁶² William J. Taylor, Jr. and Michael J. Mazarr, "US-Korean Security Relations: Post-Reunification," *The Korean Journal of Defense Analysis*, vol. 4, no. 1, Summer 1992, p. 162-163.

sharing) in Korea. It is almost assuredly more cost efficient for both countries if U.S. forces stay, than if forces leave and are later required to return to the peninsula.

2. Impact II - Political Considerations

There are several important political/diplomatic reasons for the U.S. to continue to maintain U.S. forces in Korea after unification. At the top of the list are these reasons: (1) to continue to influence and support a democratic system; (2) to assist in maintaining stability in Northeast Asia; (3) to retain relations with a longtime ally; and (4) to maintain communications with a major trading partner.⁶³

Since 1987, the Republic of Korea has been evolving into a full-fledged democratic system. This evolutionary process continues to experience even greater achievements, e.g., the election of former dissident Kim Dae Jung. Hopefully, the process that South Korea has come to expect and enjoy will continue and be shared by all after unification. To support this effort the U.S. has stated that it is committed to fostering the growth of democracy and human rights in Asia, because it is in the United

⁶³ Ministry of National Defense, *Defense White Paper 1996-1997*, (Korea, Ministry of National Defense The Republic of Korea, 1997), p. 128.

States' security interest.⁶⁴ Therefore, one of the best ways to achieve U.S. security interests and encourage a continuing transition towards democracy is to permit U.S. forces to serve in Korea after unification. In as much as an imminent threat to national security often impedes democratization, the security commitment symbolized by the presence of U.S. troops will help Koreans feel more confident in proceeding with political liberalization and will weaken the position of those who would call for a return to authoritarianism to deal with the tough challenges a united Korea will face.

The most important of all the arguments for keeping U.S. forces in a unified Korea is to preserve the stability and security posture of Northeast Asia, which ultimately contributes to the United States' security. If U.S. forces were to leave the peninsula, there may be the perception of a "power vacuum" by other regional powers and Korea might once again fall victim to being dominated by a regional power.⁶⁵ Although this scenario seems unlikely given the current global environment, one must remember that Korea has

⁶⁴ Franklin B. Weinstein and Fuji Kamiya, *The Security of Korea: U.S. and Japanese Perspectives on the 1980s*, (Boulder, Colorado, Westview Press, 1980), p. 6.

⁶⁵ Dianne L. Smith, *Asian Security to the Year 2000*, (Carlisle Barracks, Pennsylvania, Strategic Studies Institute, 1996), p. 12.

a long history of being dominated when it is perceived to be weak and unable to defend itself. Accordingly, since maintaining regional peace and stability in Asia is a security concern of the U.S., the United States has an interest in keeping its forces in Korea after unification and into the future.⁶⁶ Furthermore, Asian-Pacific states view the U.S. military presence as a reassuring factor and prefer America rather than China, Japan or Russia in the role of regional peacekeeper.

The third reason for maintaining a force in Korea is to maintain the support of a good ally in Asia. Korea's history of supporting U.S. operations, e.g., Vietnam and the Gulf War, clearly represents Korea's resolve to be a supportive ally during times of crisis. If the U.S. were to withdraw, the possibility of losing Korea as an ally would increase.

An important reason for U.S. forces to remain on the peninsula is to ensure that communication channels continue to remain open. These channels make it possible for trade and other information to flow between the two countries. Continued communications also assists in reducing cultural misunderstandings between Korea and the United States. When

⁶⁶ Franklin B. Weinstein and Fuji Kamiya, *The Security of Korea: U.S. and Japanese Perspectives on the 1980s*, (Boulder, Colorado, Westview Press, 1980), p. 96-101.

Korea unifies, it will be important to understand why certain actions and situations arise and why certain responses are being taken. By possessing a better understanding of Korean culture and maintaining communication channels, questions and diplomatic tensions can be reduced or eliminated before they ever occur.⁶⁷

3. Impact III - Military Considerations

The principal military consideration for keeping U.S. forces in Korea after unification would be to provide an overseas (forward) post that can support other U.S. forces in Asia, a fundamental part of the U.S. security policy for Asia.⁶⁸ Besides Korea serving as a forward operations center, keeping U.S. forces on the peninsula also sends a strong message to the region that the U.S. is committed to Asia's long-term stability and prosperity. U.S. forces in Korea also project the image of the U.S. as a world power. This proactive measure, whether real or perceived by other countries, could prevent a situation from occurring that might possibly drag the U.S. into another conflict. By U.S. forces remaining in Korea after unification the U.S. would

⁶⁷ Ministry of National Defense, *Defense White Paper 1996-1997*, (Korea, Ministry of National Defense The Republic of Korea, 1997), p. 130-131.

⁶⁸ Doug Bandow and Ted G. Carpenter, *The U.S.-South Korean Alliance: Time for a Change*, (New Jersey, Transaction Publishers, 1992), p. 182.

signal that although the Korean Peninsula has changed, the U.S. commitment has not and that it will continue to be engaged and interested in Asia. To this end, the benefits gained by a continued U.S. presence in the region are significant to Asia and the United States.⁶⁹

As explained earlier, there are several important military, economic, and political reasons for keeping U.S. forces in Korea after unification. The strongest reasons for a continued U.S. presence in Korea are: (1) maintaining Northeast Asia's stability; (2) projecting a proactive image to the region and world; (3) the requirement for a forward base in Asia.⁷⁰

C. SUMMARY OF THE UNITED STATES' COURSES OF ACTION

The decision on whether to keep U.S. forces on the Korean Peninsula after unification is an issue that is not likely to be easily resolved. As the North Korean threat disappears, U.S. politicians and policy makers may receive pressure from the American public and Korea to withdraw U.S. forces from a unified Korea. Considerations of a political, economic, and military nature will dominate arguments both

⁶⁹ Ministry of National Defense, *Defense White Paper 1996-1997*, (Korea, Ministry of National Defense The Republic of Korea, 1997), p. 37-39.

⁷⁰ Ibid., p. 39.

for and against forces staying or leaving.⁷¹ Nevertheless, the arguments for U.S. forces staying appear to outweigh those for withdrawing forces from Korea. It is a viable contention that if issues, such as, Northeast Asian security, stability, and trade stay on the forefront of U.S. policy making and do not fade as a result of unification, then the likelihood of U.S. forces remaining in Korea is high.

⁷¹ Ministry of National Defense, *Defense White Paper 1996-1997*, (Korea, Ministry of National Defense The Republic of Korea, 1997), p. 37-39.

VI. RECOMMENDATION

Taking into consideration both countries' national interests and public pressure, policies that accommodate both countries need to be constructed. A plan that has merit is one that calls for removing U.S. ground forces, maintaining U.S. air assets, and increasing U.S. naval presence off the Korean Peninsula.⁷²

This plan provides a number of advantages for both the U.S. and Korea. For the U.S., it assists with arguments calling for the withdrawal of forces. The plan provides Congress with a response to critics who want to downsize the military and reduce defense spending. With the removal of ground forces from Korea, total U.S. Defense expenditures for the Asia-Pacific Theater would be significantly reduced, alleviating the pressure to cut costs.

For Korea, in a sense, the same benefits are realized. If U.S. ground forces are withdrawn, the expense of burden sharing would be decreased, freeing up resources that will be required immediately following unification. Perhaps more importantly, this plan would provide Korean government officials with an answer to the possible question of why U.S. forces are needed now that Korea is unified. Reducing

⁷² William J. Taylor, Jr. and Michael J. Mazarr, "US-Korean Security Relations: Post-Reunification," *The Korean Journal of Defense Analysis*, vol. 4, no. 1, Summer 1992, p. 162.

the U.S. presence on the peninsula assist in: (1) maintaining a stable political climate and (2) lowers the Korean public's sense of being an "occupied country".

As previously mentioned, there are a number of political, economic, and military reasons for both countries to want to keep U.S. forces on the peninsula. Among the arguments for the continued service of U.S. forces on the peninsula, even at a reduced rate are: (1) maintaining the stability of Northeast Asia; (2) protecting Korea from other regional powers; (3) keeping a forward post opened; (4) strengthening a security alliance with a loyal ally; and (5) keeping communication channels open to reduce or eliminate misunderstandings.⁷³ The overwhelming benefits realized by both countries as a result of this plan make it a rational option. Needless to say, this level of policy making needs to take place prior to unification being realized, because hesitation could result in a situation that both countries dislike. Finally, this policy needs to be kept confidential and devised without sending a signal to North Korea or any other nation in Asia, for obvious security reasons.

⁷³ Ministry of National Defense, *Defense White Paper 1996-1997*, (Korea, Ministry of National Defense The Republic of Korea, 1997), p. 39-41.

VII. CONCLUSION

Throughout this paper scenarios depicting the possible courses of action that Korea unification could have on U.S. forces in Korea have been discussed. As a result of this research, it has been argued that after unification, the U.S. and Korea should continue their partnership, if for no other reason than it is in the best interest of both nations.

The recommendation of reducing the level of U.S. forces in Korea will resolve many of the political, economic, and military concerns discussed throughout this paper, thus freeing both governments to address other post-unification issues.

This research has also revealed that there is a need for further research relating to the future of U.S. forces in Korea after unification. Several suggestions for future research include:

1. Analyzing the differences between how unification is achieved and what impact it might have on U.S. forces remaining on the Korean Peninsula after unification.
2. Determining the impacts on the Northeast Asia security environment if U.S. forces remain or leave Korea after unification.

3. Identifying China's role in the unification process, if any, and evaluate China's position on U.S. forces remaining in Korea after unification.

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